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Terry kills robocalls bill

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WASHINGTON — Rep. Lee Terry's robocalls bill is dead.

"We're driving a stake through its heart," the Omaha Republican said Wednesday. "Dead. Done. Buried."

The legislation would have made it easier for people to receive autodialed, pre-recorded messages on their cellphones.

It was intended to help people conveniently receive information they wanted — notification of flight delays, school closings, prescription drug recalls and the like — while prohibiting unwanted calls, such as telemarketing solicitations.

But consumer groups condemned the proposal, saying it would open cell users to a flood of annoying calls that would drain their minutes.

Concerned constituents burned up Terry's office phone lines.

In an open letter to Congress last week, 48 of the 50 state attorneys general united in

opposition to the legislation.

Terry said he always viewed the measure as simply a technical correction and was caught off guard at the firestorm of criticism it produced. He has said repeatedly that he never wanted anyone to receive a single unwanted call.

Terry said he worked with the consumer groups and lawmakers who opposed the legislation in an effort to address all their concerns with the measure, without success.

"There was just no language where they would be comfortable and I could be assured that people wouldn't receive unwanted calls," Terry said.

So Terry and his co-sponsor, Rep. Ed Towns, D-N.Y., sent a letter Wednesday to Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, asking that the legislation not be advanced.

The letter noted that a hearing on the bill brought attention to the need to modernize out-of-date telecommunications policies.

"However, what we have learned is that there is no hope for this legislation," they wrote in the letter.

Terry said he could have refuted attacks by political opponents over the bill. Still, it was clear that public perception of the measure was not good.

Terry said he was recently approached by a woman in Dundee who very politely told him she opposed the robocalls bill.

She was thrilled when Terry told her he was killing it.

"She said 'Oh, good.' She was so nice. She was really a neat lady but (she said) 'I hate that bill.'"

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